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RELIGIOUS LIBERTY.

By an Author, as yet, unknown.

Where reason calls my duty I declare,
And hold my zeal unprostituted there.

The Third Edition.

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MDCCLXVII.





TO the memory of
B I S H O P H O A D L Y,

whose apostolic name
will be always dear to the Friends

of L I B E R T Y;

This plain essay
formed on his principles,
(that is, on the principles of
natural and christian

T R U T H,)

is respectfully inscribed;

B Y T H E E D I T O R :

while

IV. DEDICATION.

while He laments the impending
dangers of his RELIGION and

C O V N T R Y,

From the unhappy declension of
that Spirit

which animated the writings,
and formed the lustre of his Lord-
ship's Character;

From that COWARDICE
and PROSTITUTION

so visible and encreasing,
in the departments of civil
GOVERNMENT,

and among the
PROFESSORS and BENCHERS
of ecclesiastical

S T A T E .



INTRODUCTION.

AS the value of every publication, must be determined by its tendency to promote the general good, every piece which is calculated to inspire and diffuse the principles of liberty must deserve encouragement. It is confessed, with great pleasure, that as no subject is more important, none has been more nobly and honourably treated. The principles of liberty have been accurately discussed and fully settled in the writings of Locke, Hoadly and others; so that little can be added to the firmness of the structure, whatever may be done.

VI. INTRODUCTION.

done for its decoration and ornament.

On this account perhaps the following MANUAL may be despised by some and overlook'd as insignificant by others. The Editor has different apprehensions, and he begs a word or two of Introduction; where he neither means or needs apology.

Apology! Be that the task, tho' the ever unsuccessful one, of some new made Lord, who has sacrificed all the glories of an established character, all his professions, and all his experience for the prospect of a lieutenancy under his blackest foe. - Of the filky tongued apology-

INTRODUCTION. VII.

logist for the Irish massacre, or of the equally guilty but more learned professor, of either university, who has obtained or may be promised a bishopric for writing in defence of what he has before disavowed; or of what is in itself contemptible.

--- NIHIL OPUS EST HIC.

But not to indulge reflections which every occasion is presenting. --- The following discourse (which I would not call a sermon, as sermons have but little chance of sale, when this should have a great run) was preached last fifth of November to a country congregation, where the Editor happened

VIII. INTRODUCTION.

pened to put himself in. The sentiments always pleased him, and the affectionate earnestness of the speaker gave them new energy. On enquiry he found this propagator of unfashionable doctrines, was so far from the prospect of a Prebend or a Chaplainship for his services, that he is one of those men of merit, who are doomed to obscurity; and often to struggle with difficulties from which a more pliable virtue knows how to extricate itself.

The Editor thanks God that he has a heart open to the impressions of such real worth. Hence it struck him, as a becoming thing, not only to pay his personal respect

INTRODUCTION. ix.

spect to it, but if he could to procure from others the like marks of virtuous esteem. On this he beg'd not bought the sermon: And he submits it to the reading and encouragement of those who think and act freely. Happy he shall be in finding that there are many of this character. Would to God that the affections of such in the cause of liberty were as lively as the author's here introduced: then may it be hoped some other works of the same writer will meet with respectable patronage, and that a real concern for the good of Protestantism, so inseparably connected with the good of England, is more general than at present it appears to be.

.x INTRODUCTION.

VIVAT AVTOR
OPVSCVLI HVIVS
ETVIVANT OMNES
HAS DOCTRINAS COLENTES:

P L V S
CASTE QVAM CAVTE
A G E N T E S.



Galatians V. 1.

STAND FAST therefore in the liberty wherewith CHRIST hath made us free; and be not entangled again with the Yoke of Bondage.

IT has ever been the practice of interested designing men both in civil and religious matters, to consult private advantage, at the expence of general good. A regard to the latter indeed, is always professed with very zealous devotion; but with whatever truth

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it is alledged, that "perfection is not the attribute of man," abuses of authority and influence are too gross to admit of this candid apology: or if they were not, it implies no disrespect to office, to enquire into its institution and ascertain its limits.

It is not however to our present purpose, to examine into rights which, tho' important to human happiness, are purely civil; or to observe in what manner perverted authority hath, at any time, cunningly or cruelly invaded them: but in the great affair of RELIGION, the most important to all MEN, it will be very suitable, and it is hoped very acceptable, to consider

I ft.

I. THE LIBERTY wherewith
CHRIST hath made us free.

II. The DUTY of asserting and
strenuously maintaining this Char-
ter of FREEDOM.

III. The peculiar aggravated
FOLLY of being again entangled
with the Yoke of BONDAGE.

It is of no small moment right-
ly to consider the liberty where-
with Christ hath made us free.

A Church of Christ, or a reli-
gious Society, gathered in his
name, instructed by his word and
animated by his Spirit, is undoubt-
edly far from being an irregular

disorderly body: beauty and harmony are constituents of the moral as well as of the natural world. Every such Society, established upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the Chief Corner Stone, has the honour to be a CHURCH of the living God; and God is not the author of confusion, but of order and Peace. Every such society is a part of that sacred community which is founded by his supreme appointment, testified by nothing less than the mission of his Son from heaven; and which being faithful to the things he hath taught, hath the assurance of his presence unto the end of the world. They all have him for their common

mon HEAD, their universal Shepherd, Bishop or Lord; for the whole is an interest which he purchased to himself at the expence of his own life; and to his regal authority the whole is committed, as (at least a part of) the reward of his labours and sufferings on earth. Unto this end, and for this cause, was he highly exalted and made HEAD over all things, unto the Church.

However independent therefore different Churches may be in respect to one another, yet in respect to their common relation to him, they are one. The laws by which they are to be governed, and by which alone they are bound, are

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his

his laws, both for the admission of members, and the direction of their conduct as such. In his hands alone, are the rewards of their fidelity, or the punishment of their disobedience; for as to the exclusion of disorderly members, it is meerly a disclaiming of unfuitable connections, unaccompanied with any infringement of civil rights, and extending to no decision on the everlasting state of the offensive and irregular. In short considered as the subjects of JESUS, we have nothing to fear or to hope but from him.

We shall here perhaps, be reminded, and with no little share of positiveness and acrimony, that
Christ

CHRIST like other Kings, hath his commiſſioned officers or miniſters to act in his name. It is answered, that whatever his appointments of this kind were, he ever limited their authority to an entire ſubſervience to his OWN; which can make no difference either in his character as the ONE LORD of Chriſtians or in the liberal ſpirit and genius of his Religion. The utmoſt extent of his Commiſſion to his Apoſtles, was to preach his Goſpel to the world; to baptize ſuch as ſhould believe in his name; and to teach them to obſerve all things “whatſoever he had commanded them”. Beyond this, they had no authority, nor ever pretended to have

any: they were expressly ordered to renounce every such aspiring claim. "Be ye not called "RABBI, for one is your Master "even CHRIST". accordingly, says the Apostle, (who in point of authority was in no degree inferiour to the very chief) "We preach not "ourselves but Christ Jesus the "LORD, and ourselves your Servants for his sake": there is another passage of the same writer, very happy to our purpose, "The "Grace which is given to me is to "be a minister or servant of Jesus "Christ, nor will I dare to speak "of the things which Christ hath "not wrought by me to make the "Gentiles obedient in word or "deed". These were the primitive
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ministers of Christ's appointment whose instructions we see, were limited, and their authority confined. They pretended to nothing more, than to deliver faithfully to others the will of that LORD of the CHURCH to whom they themselves were equally accountable. A succession of authority from these therefore, (were it ever so clearly deduced) can do no man any service to support him in "binding where Christ hath not bound; or loosing where he hath not loosed;" for surely a derivation of power which exceeds that from whence it is derived, is a solecism too gross to need a formal confutation.

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It remains then a doctrine of the most evident obligation and importance, that the decisions of his word are never to be vacated or controuled by the authority or documents of men: but on the contrary what is delivered as from him or in his name must be examined and proved by his word; and to us can be of no force untill the conviction of its agreement therewith hath first taken place. This indeed, is the essential turning point on which the authority of our Lord, on the one hand, and the Liberty of his subjects, on the other, totally depend. Let this be taken away, the one is absolutely transferred and the other destroyed. Allow this, and it will
most

most unavoidably follow, that if our Lord (for instance) hath left us free from expensive and burdensome rites, ordaining himself very little of the ritual kind, and that little of plain intention and most easy performance, then, free we are, and ever have a right to remain so, Let who will be for reviving old laws or inventing new to incumber the service of God, whatever sophistry or superstition may urge for their introduction and observance, we are under no obligations to obedience. If offence be taken at our refusal and endeavours used to enforce these institutions by censures and anathemas, great guilt may be derived on the innovators by such impiety

ty and prophaneness, but cannot affect those who adhere to their own Master, by whom they stand or fall.

Again, do the promises of GOD announce liberty to his faithful servants from the condemnation of death, in vain shall any arrogating character under him, devote them to destruction. It is the Lord himself who openeth and no man shutteth; who shutteth and no man openeth.

The sum of our defensive and pious plea is, that the Church of Christ is a body united under him, purely for religious or spiritual purposes; that by the rules of
his

his Government no man is to be forced into this community; nor can any one become a member of it, but in consequence of his own convictions of truth and the importance of the Grace of GOD: that no man when admitted to fellowship or office hath any right to lord it over his fellow subjects, to judge or to set at nought his brother, to impose his own sense of his masters will, to alter or annul the laws of Christ, to suspend or vacate his promises; or direct the thunder of his threatnings. NO MAN, OR BODY OF MEN, can have a right to change the nature of his service from pure, spiritual and rational, into pompous, carnal and superstitious, fit
for

for little or nothing, but to make its votaries temporally poor and spiritually proud: and that wherever we find a contradiction between the word of Christ, and of those who pretend to act in his name, and stead, we are reduced to two opposite contending masters, one of which must be given up, and if we decide the dispute in favour of men, we are no longer the servants of CHRIST.

These very plain but important truths cannot be too often repeated or too largely enforced, but we attend

II. To the general duty recommended, STAND FAST &c.

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To do this with propriety and virtue we must always remember wherein liberty as a desirable object consisteth: and this is not in doing or having the power to do any thing, and any how, we please indifferently, but in a POWER UNCONTROULED BY THE INTERESTED DESIGNS OR INDISCREET ZEAL OF OUR FELLOW MORTALS, TO CHUSE AND TO ACT WELL UPON THE BEST INFORMATION WE CAN PROCURE. In whatever appears to us to be for the honour of God, the interest of truth, and the good of mankind, and wherein no one but ourselves will suffer tho' we should be wrong in our Ideas and pursuits, our Liberty is to be dear-

dearly prized, and we may wish and contend for it in its fullest extent: but, further than this it deserves not the name. Surely, no wise man would wish for the liberty of an unbroken horse, who throws himself out of his way merely for the sake of so doing, or thro' the fury of an irrational impatience of the rein which would guide him for the best. But let men cover it with whatever pretences they will, it is an usurpation of the most daring and indefensible kind for one frail mortal to set himself up as the absolute guide of another, as if the one were an oracle of wisdom and truth, the other a horse or a mule without understanding, whose
mouth

mouth must be held in with bit and bridle. With what shadow of reason were such AIRS ever assumed, or by what strange kind of meanness ever submitted to? certain it is however, that the meek and beneficent JESUS tho' adorned with the WISDOM and POWER of God never once treated human nature with this scornful insolence. His exhortations to mankind were of quite another tendency, exciting them to search the scriptures, to strip error of its disguise, to judge righteous judgment, and to hear every one of them and understand. Thus, also the Apostle, with a candour and decency which his inferiours have rarely CONDESCENDED to, I
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“speak as to wise, or rational men,
“judge ye what I say”.

It is therefore the undoubted duty of every Christian to acquaint himself, as his opportunities and abilities will admit, with the nature and extent of interesting truth; and with that noble charter, of privileges, which belongs to the BODY or Church, of which he has the honour to be a member. And let me add, it is the duty of those who have the best advantages for this purpose, to assist them that have least; instead of pleading a fanciful, exclusive, right of their own, and (as it is too common) insulting the means and inability of their brethren.

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what is the tendency of this upon the whole, but to teach them in effect that religion is none of their business, or truth their concern? Let us be assured however with much better reason and upon much better authority, that it is the duty of all, (tho' of some eminently) to be uniform and stedfast in that liberty wherewith their common Lord hath made them free; observing the Apostle's caution, Brethren ye are called unto liberty, only use it not for an occasion to the flesh. The Apostle did not reason as those men do, who are for giving up the most valuable rights of mankind because sometimes they are misapplied or abused. And, indeed, if

this were a good argument, civil government itself must be given up, which, tho' it can hardly be called a natural right, has been often and most flagrantly abused. But Saint Paul, we see, tho' he cautions christians against the abuses of their liberty, yet most generously acquaints them that it was their right. So also the Apostle Peter -- as free, yet not using your liberty for a cloak of maliciousness.

Is any man called then to the office of public instruction and exhortation, let him consider it as ever implying a right to speak to the best of his knowledge and improvements, as becometh the O-
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RACLES of GOD; remembering, with the same lively attention, that all things are to be done with charity, and nothing thro' Rife or vain-glory. To surrender this even tacitly, to the humours or interests of men, is a mean unmanly bondage, which no liberal mind will on the one side ever desire, or on the other ever submit to. On the other hand for a christian people to resign their own understandings, and to swallow implicitly whatever comes from a teacher by profession, is infamous; and however for peculiar purposes, honoured with the title of christian humility and subordination is, a proof of nothing so much, as that they

neither know nor care about the matter. But, if both stand fast, and as, with mutual firmness, with mutual charity and candour, to their respective rights, they will be so far from interfering, or creating discord, that both will strive together for the faith of the Gospel; the one speaking with impartiality and freedom, the other hearing with an attentive, unprejudiced mind, and both remembering that one is their master even Christ. Where such a spirit is happily prevalent, innovations of consequence will be next to impossible. If impositions to which the sacred canon is a stranger be attempted, they can scarce fail of immediate detection; and

and place to subjection will be given, no not for an hour.

To enforce every proper kind of vigilance we would observe

III. The peculiar folly of being entangled again with the Yoke of Bondage.

As to such as have had gradual advantage taken of their inexperience, and for whom a net has been spread till they were ensnared beyond their expectation and power of redress; tho' we cannot commend their wisdom, we may afford them our compassion: and those to whom slavery has been transmitted as an inheritance from

their indolent fathers, have a still better right to it tho' it has seldom happened, that either have met with relief. But when a people who have suffered even to torture, under the IRON Yoke, have been delivered by providences equally happy and surprizing, and permitted to enjoy their freedom in a flowing cup, shall suffer themselves to be flattered when they cannot be forced, and perswaded by partial considerations to resign public rights, till they can no more recall them-- what shall we say? One cannot say they deserve pity, and the wonder will not be great if they should never meet with it. Their ingratitude is as provoking as their folly is extreme

trement. We may apply to them, with little variation, the words of EZRA to ISRAEL. After all that hath come upon you for your evil deeds, and the punishments less than your iniquities have deserved; if after so great a deliverance as this, ye shall return again to folly, and flattered perhaps with a small share of the plunder, join in affinity with the known enemies of truth and liberty, will ye not deserve to be utterly consumed, and even derided for your stupid credulity?

The best way to prevent this contempt and distress is to stand fast while we may, and not to make a compliment of our rights
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at all; no, not in those matters which we are told are but of small consequence: If they are so indeed, or rather of no importance to religion whatever, where is the hardship of their ever remaining such? Or why should importance be given in the Church of Christ to what he himself never thought fit to give any? Were not the Jewish ceremonies to which the text relates, and for which many were so zealous in the primitive Church, as harmless and innocent, and no doubt in their view as decent and comely as any? And yet, tho' they had been once honoured with a divine institution, the Apostle would not suffer this Yoke to be laid upon the neck of the di-

disciples. The truth is, the consequences of such things, however unforeseen, have been always unfortunate. They have defaced the beauty, corrupted the simplicity and enervated the power, of a pure and spiritual worship. And whatever importance they might seem to give in the Church to those who were supposed to have the right of their direction, they have reduced OUR Jerusalem and her Children to an ignominious bondage. Some of her Sons have both seen and lamented it: and as far as they durst have remonstrated against it. But with what effect? Perhaps they have been told, these trappings are now become so necessary that they must
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not be removed, lest the rent become fatal. Thus, at length TRUTH is beholden it seems to fallshood for its own precarious existence, a thought which one would imagine should excite the indignation of every real friend to its interests, and induce him to stand firm to his sense of duty and privilege while he may.

Permit me in the last place to apply what has been said to the occasion of the day.

Our fathers, in the days of the reformation, looking into the holy scriptures and comparing the religion of the Gospel, with what then passed for christianity, found them-

themselves wretchedly imposed upon, by an enormous heap of superstition and absurdity. Providence at length opened a way for their escape. They seized it, and, to their immortal honour, did for the time very great things. But men are too fond of power, however ill-gotten, to lose it quietly. All means were employed to recover it, the most desperate and bloody not excepted. Their cruelties were bravely sustained and their machinations critically detected and defeated. We were delivered as a bird from the snare of the fowler, the snare was broken and we escaped.

This season of the year has
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been rendered memorable by two great events of this kind, the one a deliverance from the most infernal project of villainy, that ever entered into the heart of man; the other of a later and still happier date, when an arbitrary tyrant was driven from these kingdoms, and Protestant Government established in all its honours under that Patron of Liberty and Law WILLIAM the THIRD.

Events of such vast national importance and blessing both in civil and sacred life, we profess, with the highest reason, to commemorate with gratitude. Would to God we were indeed disposed, not only thankfully to remember
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but wisely to improve them. But, if reports do not greatly deceive us, we have reason to lament that the FACT is otherwise. Our people in the metropolis and other parts of the kingdom, are returning, with avidity, to the old superstition again. And great pains have been taken, in some late well received publications, to persuade us -- That we have even lost more than we have gained by our reformation, by the revolution, and by all the liberties of which we have boasted: -- that the papal establishment is nothing so terrible as it has been represented: that her saints, images, holy relics and ceremonies, are not only innocent, but edifying to the vulgar,

gar, rendering them devout, passive, and serious, while our wild Protestant liberties, only serve to unsettle and distract them, and to make them disorderly, vicious and atheistical. Might not one justly apply here the Apostle's words, with the necessary alteration, "O ye Britons who hath bewitched you"! It is very easy, no doubt, to pass over former cruelties and outrages with a superficial flourish, as fables and scarecrows fit only to frighten children. But may we not defy the whole world (as Bp. Fleetwood well observes) to give one single example wherein this innocent system could (with self-security) destroy such as would not submit to it, and did not do it

it not every where live within its guards, Inquisitors and Dragoons; and support its power by gibbets, axes, fire and sword and all the Instruments of death? And do we long to return to the discipline of these wholesome correctives?

But for all this, these writers have perhaps their remedy at hand. They could CONFORM, and bow down to the idol in fashion. Probably they might; but let them spare themselves the trouble of chusing an establishment for many times seven thousand, who, it is to be hoped, would not; and who have some suspicion that one day both the stupidity and hypocrisy of men
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shall be accounted for.

That our people, however are corrupt and vicious enough is not to be denied; and (if that were any comfort) it might be difficult to prove that catholics are much better; but as to ourselves, if we were not as destitute of thought as we are degenerate in morals, it would surely be impossible for them to make such numbers of profelytes. Nothing can be a greater reflection upon our understanding as well as gratitude. Let it be our care then, not only to stand up with an unshaken magnanimity for the rights of men and christians and to be tenacious of them in de-

defiance of every arbitrary invasion or cajoling interest, but to shew our real well-founded esteem for them by a consistent practice. Liberty it self, all-lovely and all-glorious as it is, you will consider is not a virtue; but a field wherein to exert it with advantage: yet, where liberty is wanting, little that is great and valuable can be expected. Let us from hence be concerned to apply it to those exalted purposes, which the wise will own, and the good reflect upon with pleasure; the advancement of truth virtue and general happiness. Let that kind of adherence to it be eminently exemplified, which shall at once manifest a reverence for our Blessed

Saviour's character and our charity and beneficence to men.

In a word, let us be earnest to shew that tho' we will not be the servants of men where we are under no obligations to obedience, yet that none are more ready to be the servants of all to do them good: none more willing to render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, as well as unto God the things that are his.

Thus shall we disarm objections, which not daring to look a good cause directly in the face, are levelled only at accidental abuses; and thus shall we best secure

(37)

cure his protection, who said of himself " To this end was I born, and for this purpose came I into the world, that I might bear witness unto the TRUTH."

FINIS.

